

# **WILDLIFE HARVEST AND POPULATION STATUS REPORT**

## **RUFFED GROUSE – 2000**

**Michael W. Hubbard**  
**Wildlife Research Biologist**

### ***POPULATION STATUS***

Spring drumming route surveys in 2000 continue to show low grouse population levels. A total of 9 drumming routes were completed. None suggest increasing grouse populations. A complete area count on the 3,250-acre Daniel Boone Conservation Area (DBCA) was conducted as part of a monitoring project to determine whether maximizing early successional forest on DBCA will result in an increase in grouse numbers. This survey detected 3 grouse, a decline from 7 in 1999, and 12 in 1998. These 3 years of data establish a grouse abundance baseline before timber harvests designed to improve grouse habitat are implemented. Timber harvest was scheduled for completion during the winter of 2000, but poor economic conditions delayed the harvest. The timber harvest is now scheduled for fall of 2000. However, even after timber the scheduled timber harvests are completed, it will be 5–10 years before the areas are capable of providing suitable grouse habitat.

A complete area count was also conducted on the Thomas S. Baskett Wildlife Education and Research Center (TSBWERC; 2,240 acres) near Ashland, Missouri. This long-term survey also indicated a continued decline in grouse numbers. The Baskett drumming route revealed 2 grouse in 1998 and 1999, and 0 drumming males in 2000. Numbers of grouse detected on both the DBCA and the TSBWERC during complete area counts in 2000 continue to be well below the long-term averages and are the lowest recorded since grouse were released on these sites in 1959–60.

The continued low grouse numbers may be cause for concern not only for grouse, but numerous wildlife species that rely on early successional forest habitat during some or all of their life history stages. While grouse may be the species that are being monitored, other species may also be declining in Missouri due to the loss of early successional forest habitat.

While habitat may be a factor in the decline of grouse in Missouri, there is no reason to believe that it is the only variable influencing grouse populations. It is possible that at some threshold level, populations could be dramatically impacted by various biotic (i.e. predation) or abiotic (weather) factors that under normal circumstances would only slow population growth, but during extreme fluctuations associated with normal stochastic variation, could lead to dramatic reductions in actual numbers.

The Missouri Chapter of the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) has also expressed concern over the decline in grouse numbers and is interested in seeing the Missouri Department of Conservation take an active role in enhancing grouse habitat on our public ground. RGS is also interested in partnerships through the new Private Lands Division to increase the awareness of the public regarding the benefit to numerous wildlife species of early successional forest habitat. RGS has also requested quarterly or semi-annual meetings with MDC to acquire information, provide input and to help, where ever possible, with any plans or ventures to improve early successional forest cover for wildlife in the state.